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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000583

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER CLOSELY MANAGING PROVINCIAL  
COALITION-BUILDING IN THE SOUTH

REF: A. HILLAH 20  
[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 520  
[1](#)C. BAGHDAD 500  
[1](#)D. BAGHDAD 477

Classified By: Senior Advisor Gordon Gray for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

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Summary  
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[1](#)1. (C) Prime Minister Maliki is closely managing coalition-building in provinces where his Da'wa-led State of Law list performed well in the elections, and has reached agreements on alliances in most of the ten Shi'a-majority provinces. March 2-3 meetings in Babil and Karbala with Senior Advisor Gordon Gray indicated that Da'wa is taking a flexible approach, partnering with different parties in different provinces, and conceding key leadership positions in some places. Da'wa appears to be partnering with the Sadrists everywhere except Karbala, where intra-Da'wa reconciliation is a more important objective for Maliki. Babil features a broader coalition, including not only the Sadrists, but also the parties of ex-Prime Ministers Allawi and Ja'afari. ISCI and its Badr militia are excluded from these coalitions but discussions continue about granting ISCI leadership slots in other provinces. End summary.

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Babil: Building A Broad Coalition  
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[1](#)2. (C) As part of the Prime Minister's efforts to tightly control coalition-building in the southern provinces, representatives from all the major parties considered traveled to Baghdad during the last week of February to hammer out provincial alliances. Abu Ahmed al-Basri, the Prime Minister's representative in Babil and a participant in the discussions, told Gray that the latest round of discussions sealed a firm alliance in Babil including Da'wa/State of Law, the Sadrists Tayar al-Ahrar, Ja'afari's Reform Party, former Governor Iskander Witwit's independent slate, and, finally, the Iraqi National List. The coalition comprises 20 of the 30 seats on the Babil Provincial Council (PC). Basri confirmed reports (ref A) that the Prime Minister is looking for a Governor from outside the PC and Da'wa -- a concession recognizing the needs of bringing together five parties in a province where Da'wa only won eight seats. Witwit reported in his meeting with Gray that he will be the next Deputy Governor; Basri later confirmed this. The PC Chairmanship has not yet been determined.

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Karbala: Reuniting Da'wa  
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[1](#)3. (C) The governing coalition being assembled in neighboring Karbala province will look considerably different, given the priorities of the Prime Minister in that province. Governor Aqeel (Da'wa), who will be stepping down

from his position but will remain on the PC, outlined an agreed-upon two-party coalition with State of Law and the Hope of Two Rivers, each of which have nine of the 27 PC seats. The two lists are both essentially Da'wa-based, but split over the Governor's orchestrated dismissal over the province's Iraqi Security Forces commander in late 2008 (ref D). The two sides have not yet agreed among themselves about the governor's seat. Amal al-Din al-Hir, Director General for Agriculture and leading candidate from State of Law, did not push his case to become governor, but said that the Two Rivers list had no experience on the PC and would need a lot of assistance. Al-Hir emphasized the philosophical unity between the two lists, saying of both, "Whatever the Prime Minister says, we will follow."

14. (C) Yusef al-Haboubi, the leading recipient of votes in Karbala on his one-man list, is still considering an offer from the Prime Minister to become part of the coalition. Qfrom the Prime Minister to become part of the coalition. Haboubi, according to Hir, would have a "service role, not a political role." Instead of an executive position, Haboubi has been offered chairmanship of the PC committee of his choice overseeing service delivery.

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Skittish About the Sadrists  
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15. (C) Sadrists are notably absent from the coalition in Karbala; it appears likely that Karbala will be the only Shi'a-majority province in which Da'wa and the Sadrists do not line up together. As the Da'wa-Sadrism political alliance inches closer to reality elsewhere, Da'wa

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representatives were much more reluctant than in previous meetings to acknowledge the nature of discussions. Ageel said that "there are no negotiations in any province" while Basri stated that "the Sadrists came to us only after the elections." Each of these assertions is very easy to disprove. Basri, like Da'wa representatives in other provinces, was not especially eager to outline the governance positions that the Sadrists will receive within the coalition. While praising the specific Sadrism candidates elected, he explained that there are five executive positions in provincial government and five advisory slots, and suggested that the Sadrists might be happy just to hold advisory positions. Da'wa clearly is skittish about whether the public will accept the idea of Sadrists actually running key government offices and committees.

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ISCI/Badr  
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16. (C) With ISCI/Badr excluded from provincial coalitions, ISCI/Badr-Da'wa tensions are running close to the surface. In Babil, Basri stated repeatedly that he is worried about violence from Badr members, and said that Badr had recently received new weaponry from Iran. Hassan Hamoon and Hassan Hamza, Babil PC member (Shahid al-Mihrib) and Badr Organization provincial leader, respectively, told Gray that State of Law only won about 60,000 votes in Babil and is not as powerful or popular as many assume. Hamza boasted of efforts in Baghdad to transfer tribal support council funding and management out of the Prime Minister's office. This boast proved accurate: on March 5, ISCI, the Kurds, and the Sunni Iraq Islamic Party passed an amendment to the federal budget transferring the tribal support program to the ISCI-friendly Martyrs Committee within the Ministry of Interior. (Note: Hamza had been arrested and detained the previous night for getting in a fistfight with a doctor at a local hospital, but was able to get released from jail in time to make our meeting. End note.)

17. (C) To smooth over differences, Da'wa representatives, especially in Karbala, were careful to give the impression that they are at least considering concessions to ISCI in other provinces. Najaf is a particular point of contention. Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) contacts in Najaf report that the Prime Minister's office insists that ISCI, which finished second to Da'wa in the province, should not get the governor's or PC chairman's seat in its traditional stronghold. According to one rumor heard from multiple contacts, Da'wa may be willing to concede the governor's seat in Diwaniyah, where it won handily and where its own members have been squabbling (ref D), in order to maintain control in Najaf. PRT Diwaniyah recently met with the outgoing ISCI governor, who has the distinct impression that he is leaving office. The ISCI Deputy Governor of Diwaniyah considers himself still a candidate for the governor's slot, however. In other provinces where ISCI showed relatively well, including Maysan and Muthanna, they are expected to get a deputy governor's seat.

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Flexible Management  
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18. (C) The Prime Minister's representatives in Babil and Karbala strongly hinted that he would like to reunite the Shi'a along the lines of United Iraqi Alliance in advance of the national elections. To make this happen, the Prime Minister's office has shown flexibility in its management of coalition-building by province. Da'wa representatives are happy to promote their conciliatory approach to awarding provincial executive positions; as Basri said, "if someone Qprovincial executive positions; as Basri said, "if someone has to sacrifice a position, we will do it." The Prime Minister will still take a hardball approach to alliances when it promotes his interests, as evidenced by his decision to reject the Sadrists in Karbala in order to forge a coalition that reunites the Da'wa party. Aqeel and (to a lesser extent) Hir suggested that local discomfort with the Sadrists was relayed to Maliki, which played a role in the Prime Minister's thinking. But provincial representatives in most areas are especially loyal and indebted to the Prime Minister for ensuring their victory, giving him great power to set up a system of alliances in which every Shi'a party gets something and nobody gets everything. With ISCI challenging Maliki in parliament and succeeding, it remains to be seen if the strategy will achieve its apparent downrange goal of reuniting the Shi'a under Maliki.  
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